

## Research Article

# Community Forestry Practices of Ta Oi Ethnic group in the Central Annamite of Indochina: A Case Study in a Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province, Viet Nam

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## Abstract

This paper aims to analyse a famous model of community forest conservation and management of ethnic minority (or indigenous) people in central anamite, Viet Nam. These practices of the local community have existed for a long time in the region and were recently adopted by government laws. However, the customary laws of local community and indigenous knowledge of local people has declined due to various factors, including changes in society, economy, environment, and perception, due to various factors. Research conducted in A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province, through household interviews, group discussions, and field surveys, found that community forest conservation retains religious and human significance. They often represent some of the last remaining natural forests due to deforestation by human activities. The research results indicate challenges that conservation of community forestry may face, while giving recommendations derived from communities for sustainable forest development and conservation in the region.

## Introduction

A Luoi district, located in Thua Thien Hue province, lies at the heart of the biodiversity corridor in the Central Annamite region. This area serves as a transitional zone between nature reserves in Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The management and conservation of natural resources, particularly forest resources, in this region is critically important as it connects protected areas across Southeast Asia and facilitates cross-border biodiversity conservation. Effective conservation in this area, especially for the remaining natural forests, requires the full participation of local communities, particularly as local livelihoods, production, and income are closely tied to forest resources and forestland.

However, forest management and conservation in A Luoi district faces numerous pressures and challenges due to the increasing demand for land and resources to support economic development and improve the livelihoods of local communities. Top-down administrative solutions have often failed to gain consensus from local residents and have not effectively engaged them in planning, implementing resource management, or conservation efforts. This has resulted in failures to protect forest resources, not only in strictly protected areas but also in ecological restoration and buffer zones, which have been subjected to encroachment. The critical question is how to harmonize economic development with nature conservation, while preserving the cultural values of the communities living in buffer zones. This would enable local communities to

become core stakeholders, ensuring successful and effective forest conservation.

Statistics indicate that natural forest resources in A Luoi district are severely degraded, particularly in terms of forest quality [1]. The main cause is illegal logging and trading of forest products, which have become increasingly complex of the forest management due to multiple forest owners and differing interests, making forest conservation a critical and urgent priority. Furthermore, the role of local communities in managing, conserving, and utilizing forest resources has not been adequately emphasized. The forest area allocated to communities for management accounts for only 7% of the district's total forest area. Meanwhile, the livelihoods of local people, particularly the Ta Oi ethnic group (accounting for 55% of the district's population), are heavily dependent on forest resources.

Community-based natural resource conservation by the Ta Oi people is a sustainable approach, as it has endured over time and is continuously supplemented and improved. This approach has persisted alongside the presence of the Ta Oi people in Central Viet Nam, despite numerous political and social changes (Figure 1).

## Methods

The research involved household interviews, group discussions, and field surveys in A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province. The stratified random sampling was applied to select the households to be interviewed from the list of households

provided by official village headman. There were two hundred and ten Ta Oi households interviewed by the enumerators and the group discussions accordingly. All primary data collected from survey has been analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Findings

The data analysis has been done in combination with information of group discussion and the secondary data collected in the field work at A Luoi district. The following sections provide detailed information on the community forest conservation of Ta Oi ethnic group in the central Annamites.

### The Ta Oi people in A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue

The Ta Oi ethnic group is one of 21 ethnic groups belonging to the Mon-Khmer linguistic family, residing along the Annamite Mountain Range. The name "Ta Oi" has been recorded as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Le Quy Don's work *Phu bien tap luc* [3]. According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, the Ta Oi ethnic group in Viet Nam has a population of 43,886 people, living across 39 of Viet Nam's 63 provinces and municipalities. The Ta Oi primarily live in Thua Thien Hue province (29,558 people, accounting for 67.35% of the total Ta Oi population in Viet Nam), Quang Tri province (13,961 people, accounting for 31.81%), Thanh Hoa province (37 people), and Quang Nam province (33 people).

In Laos, an estimated 30,876 Ta Oi people reside in Saravan Province, according to the 2015 Lao Population Census and *Ethnologue*.

Like other ethnic groups living in the Annamite Mountains, the Ta Oi people's lives are closely tied to forest resources. This includes clearing forests for swidden agriculture, managing water resources, utilizing forest products, and engaging in cultural and spiritual activities related to forests [4-6]. The formation and development of the Ta Oi ethnic group have been influenced by interactions and movements of neighboring ethnic groups, both in the past and during the late 19th and early 20th centuries [7]. This has led to ongoing debates about the classification of certain subgroups within the Ta Oi ethnicity, particularly in the North Central region of Viet Nam where the Ta Oi reside (Table 1).

Between the Ta Oi and Co Tu ethnic groups in the studied areas, there are notable differences in terms of ethnic history, development levels, language, and cultural characteristics. However, due to their long-term cohabitation and shared goals of mastering nature and resisting foreign invasions, these two ethnic groups have formed many similarities, particularly in terms of socio-economic development within the same ethnographic-historical region [6].

### Traditional concepts of communal land ownership among the Ta Oi and Co Tu

**Communal land resources** are a type of resource closely tied to the collective ownership of villages/hamlets, forming an integral component of the living space or "social space"

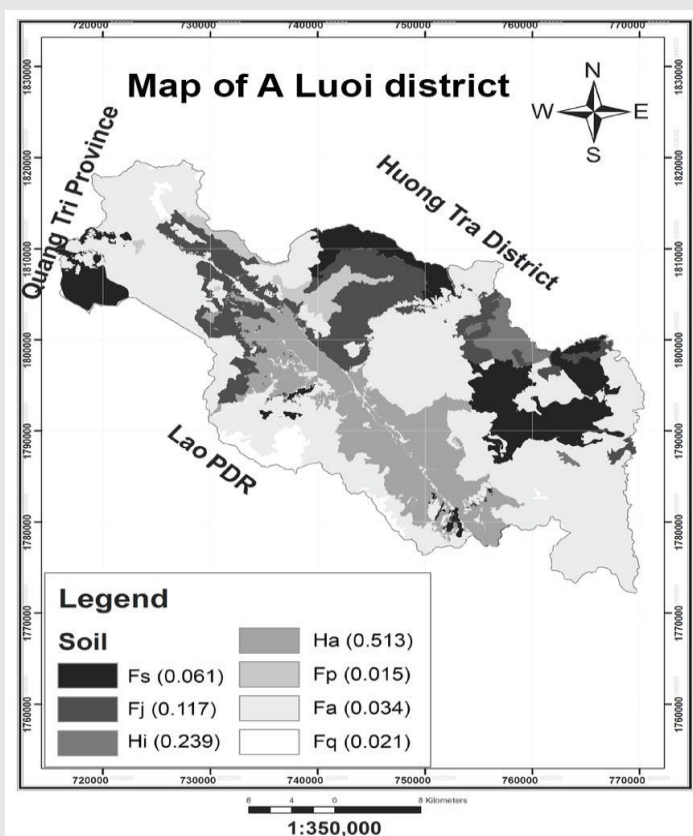


Figure 1: Map of A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province (study site) [2].

**Table 1:** Summary of ethnic composition in Thua Thien Hue region.

Ethnic	Other names	Local Groups
Ta Oi	Ta Uot, Kautur, Kin Do, Kinne, Ka Tang,	
Bru-Vân Kieu	Viên Kieu, Viên Kieu	Vân Kieu, Tri, Khua, Macoong
Co Tu	Katu, Khatu, K'tu, Ca Tu, Cao, Ha, Phrang	(locally known as Vil, Val, Vel),

Source: Hoang Son (ed), 2007. [8]

for mountainous areas in Asia, including Viet Nam. However, this type of resource has often been overlooked in scientific discussions and is subject to varying interpretations [7], particularly regarding spiritual forests (also known as sacred forests or ghost forests).

In a traditional village of the Ta Oi and Co Tu there exist two forms of ownership over forest and forestland resources: **individual ownership** and **community ownership**. These two forms coexist, reflecting a “dual” structure but are valued differently in traditional communal ownership concepts. Essentially, the predominant and overarching form of ownership for the Ta Oi and Co Tu in the past was **village community ownership** [9].

Previously, for the Ta Oi and Co Tu, all land, forests, mountains, streams, and natural resources within the village's territory were managed and owned collectively by the village, serving as shared resources accessible to all community members. Every member was treated equally in accessing communal land. However, if individuals or households wished to clear new swidden fields or start a new agricultural season, they were required to seek permission from the village chief and the approval of the spirits [8].

To the community, land and forest resources were communal property of the village, but individuals who discovered or cultivated land first were respected and acknowledged.

Thus, the dual ownership forms of **village communal ownership** and **individual ownership** over communal land resources were integral to the traditional society of the Ta Oi and Co Tu. These ownership structures played a significant role in maintaining a balance between the natural and human systems.

## Forms of forest resource conservation among the Ta Oi

In A Luoi district, several traditional forms of forest resource conservation have been practiced by local ethnic groups, including the Ta Oi community. These conservation practices adhere to the current legal frameworks, such as forestry laws, environmental protection laws, and biodiversity regulations.

### a) Community-based forest conservation:

Survey results in A Luoi reveal that community-based forest management has long-standing origins and has been practiced for generations. These include:

- Traditional community forests recognized by the community for generations.
- Village forests officially certified with land use rights.
- Forests allocated to groups of households for co-management.
- Forests allocated to individual households, who voluntarily form groups for joint management.

The community-based forest conservation can be considered as a common and sustainable approach over time. Despite changes brought about by state management models, wars, and periods of turmoil, community-based forest conservation has persisted among local ethnic groups. This practice, passed down through generations, is deeply rooted in folklore and customs.

Each community has distinct natural, economic, and social conditions that influence its development. Survey results from the research sites indicate that communities with different conditions and development levels exhibit varying capacities for forest management and benefit-sharing **Table 2**. Summarizes several evaluation criteria for community-based forest management among the Ta Oi ethnic group.

The results in Table 2. Indicate that most of the Ta Oi ethnic community resides near natural forest areas. Their daily lives and activities are closely connected to the forest, both materially and spiritually [6]. The Ta Oi people categorize forests into two types: (i) spiritual forests and (ii) production forests. Therefore, they demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility in managing community-owned forests. According to the Ta Oi perspective, forests provide daily sustenance and serve as a primary source of income: “The mountains give us many birds and rats; the forests grant us fields to cultivate” [9]. These beliefs form a set of customary laws, traditions, and practices for the sustainable exploitation and protection of forest resources. These include rules guiding the community's interaction with the forest and its resources to ensure long-term forest preservation.

### b) Traditional forest conservation practices of the Ta Oi ethnic group

**Table 2:** Evaluation criteria in community forest management of the Ta Oi ethnic group

Evaluation criteria	Level
Community forest management level (Technical, organizational and managerial level, responsibilities of individuals, group leader and village leader)	High (understanding of legal policies)
Community forest dependence	High, including essential needs such as food, shelter, and cultural practices.
Household economic development	Low (poverty level, family income)
Community location for development opportunities	less favorable (forest-derived income below 30%)
Distance from home to natural forest edge	Near (less than 1 km)

Source: 2022 Survey Results

In Ta Oi tradition, spiritual forests are categorized into three types:

- Watershed protection forests (Kõh a vưal đặc),
- Sacred forests (Remote forests), and
- Spirit forests (Ktrung) [10].

For sacred or forbidden forests, the Ta Oi people, who heavily rely on nature, hold profound reverence for natural phenomena. Faced with extraordinary natural occurrences (such as clouds, rain, thunder, lightning, deep streams, high mountains, and giant trees) that they could not explain, they sanctified these phenomena. The Ta Oi believe that the universe consists of four realms. Group discussions in Quang Nham, Hong Van, and A Ngo communes revealed the following descriptions of the four realms (Figure 2):

- **Heavenly Realm (Bârbàng):** This is an infinite realm with absolute power, determining the existence of humans and all living creatures on Earth. It is also the dwelling place of the gods, who become angered by disrespectful or irreverent actions toward them.
- **Living Realm (Parmông):** This is the existential space of humans, animals, and plants, where human life is most significant. However, humans are but a small part of nature's vast and fierce domain. Thus, they must submit to, revere, and harmonize with nature.
- **Water Realm (Xà đak):** This is the living space for aquatic species like shrimp and fish. It is also home to water spirits (Tu đô), which the Ta Oi fear greatly. According to their customs, drowning victims are believed to be taken by water spirits, and such deaths are considered bad omens. These individuals cannot be buried in spirit forests.
- **Realm of the Dead (Đehârde):** This underground space houses the souls of the deceased (ar vai) and is the domain of ghosts and spirits, which cause disasters and suffering. To ensure peace and health, offerings and tributes must be made to the spirits, and possessions must be shared with the deceased [11].

In-depth interviews with village elders in Parinh hamlet revealed the following gods ("Yàng"): the gods of the land (Ca tiéc), water (Đak), trees (Ălloong), rivers (Caruung), mountains (Ca koong), forests (Arih), sky (Bârbàng), clouds (Tilục), thunder (Grăm), and lightning (Câmmlá). Among these, the gods of the sky and land are the most feared. This cosmology and belief in animism are the origins of spiritual forests, which have been preserved in the consciousness and practices of the Ta Oi people over time.

For the Ta Oi community, sacred or forbidden forests are areas believed to be inhabited by powerful deities that they revere and worship. Sacred forests often contain large trees (usually near watershed areas) and are home to dangerous animals like white snakes, large pythons, water serpents, and

tigers. Spirit forests, on the other hand, are burial grounds for the deceased, housing spirits and ghosts that bring misfortune if offended.

In Village 2 (Hong Thai commune), there are sacred forests and spirit forests (Table 3) where the Ta Oi people carry out forest conservation at a high level.

Survey results in Parinh hamlet show the existence of two types of spiritual forests:

- **Sacred Forests:** Located in the Ka te Dam area (also known as Cu thi Cu tham). Despite their small size (about 0.5 hectares), these forests are associated with sacred water-related legends.
- **Spirit Forests:** Covering an area of about 1 hectare, this forest serves as a burial ground for the village and is referred to as the "battlefield" due to its use as an anti-aircraft artillery site during the anti-American resistance. It later became the village cemetery.

To protect these forests, the Ta Oi have created legends and myths about these areas, certain tree species, and some wild animals. Passed down orally, these stories have been preserved through generations. Over time, these forests have become sanctified, and no one dares to harm them.



Figure 2: Traditional festival of celebrating a harvesting season.

Table 3: Regulations on sacred forests and spirit forests in Hong Thai commune.

Activities	Allowed	Not Allowed
Collecting firewood	x	
Grazing buffaloes and cows		x
Cutting trees, clearing fields for production		x
Worshipping, gathering in large numbers	x	
Hunting wild animals		x
Building tombs, burying the dead		x
Passing by	x	
Catching fish, throwing stones into sacred abysses		x
Swearing, shouting, littering, urinate, defecate		x
Building houses		x

Source: Survey results of Paring village, Hong Thai commune, 2022 [17]

The Ta Oi ethnic group believes that all things have souls, and polytheistic beliefs govern all aspects of their lives. Therefore, they respect and believe in gods, for example, the water god, the fire god, the earth god, etc. [6]. In the past, the Ta Oi ethnic group held a ceremony to worship the Sky (Yang), locally called Abang, the Earth God called Katek and the Forest God called Krum Kaek. For the ceremony, they often prepared very lavish offerings compared to their economic capacity. Animals were slaughtered to worship the gods and the regulations were to worship the Sky with 12 types of food, worship the Earth with 08 types of food...

Regarding the traditional management of spiritual forests by the Ta Oi ethnic group, the spiritual forest space is collectively owned by the village community and self-managed by the village itself. However, this is a unique spiritual space, sanctified in the consciousness, spirit, and practical production activities of the Ta Oi people, leading to significant differences, in terms of management practices, compared to other types of communal land ownership in the village. The results of the survey on permissible and prohibited actions within the spiritual forests in Parinh hamlet are detailed in Table 3.

The customary regulations of the Ta Oi ethnic group have existed for generations in their traditional society. In the perception of the Ta Oi people, sacred forests and spirit forests belong to nature but are governed by deities. Acts of logging or unauthorized encroachments into spiritual forests are considered offenses against the deities (Yàng) who oversee these forests. Such transgressions provoke the deities' anger, leading to droughts, diseases, floods, crop failures, or disturbances in the forest ecosystem.

- **For primary forests:** These are areas where villagers are allowed to clear land for swidden agriculture, hunting, and collecting forest products. These forests have been rapidly declined after 1975 due to economic development and immigration of people from the lowland to upland. These forests serve as production forests and the primary source of livelihood for the local people. The Ta Oi believe these old forests contain fertile land (identified through traditional indicators). Individuals and families are free to exploit these areas based on their capacity and household size. The use of these forests is guided by longstanding experiences and the rules established in customary laws.
- **For secondary forests:** These are forests that regenerate on areas of primary forests previously cleared for swidden agriculture. Over time, the vegetation cover and soil fertility of these areas recover. Secondary forests are used by the Ta Oi to clear land for short-term crops, fruit trees, and other agricultural products.

### Indigenous knowledge in forest conservation among the Ta Oi ethnic group

Through centuries of production and survival, the Ta Oi people have accumulated valuable knowledge, particularly in adapting to their natural geographic environment. The Ta Oi

community in A Luoi district, and more broadly in the Central Annamite region, possesses extensive indigenous knowledge about the management, conservation, exploitation, and sustainable use of the natural resources surrounding them. For generations, this knowledge has been utilized to maximize the natural resources around their living areas, supporting the community's survival and development. Indigenous knowledge among the Ta Oi is applied in various aspects of production, such as weather forecasting, selecting land for cultivation, choosing settlement locations, and identifying water sources for use. Given the critical role of forests, the Ta Oi people impart wisdom to younger generations with the saying: "The sacred mountains and forests demand respect — tread carefully and breathe with respect".

- **Knowledge in weather forecasting:** Based on accumulated knowledge and experience, the Ta Oi people can predict weather patterns to support their annual agricultural activities. The Ta Oi community in Thua Thien Hue, particularly in A Luoi district, has developed an agricultural calendar for farming. The Ta Oi divide the year into 12 months, with January coinciding with the lunar calendar's December.
- **Knowledge in selecting land for cultivation:** The Ta Oi determine suitable land for farming based on the seasonal call of the Pricoh bird, which signals the start of a new agricultural season. When the *Pricoh* bird calls, indicating the beginning of a new cycle, the Ta Oi begin selecting fields for cultivation, typically after the Lunar New Year. Fields are usually located on hillsides, slopes, or near the base of mountains; they never choose hilltops or mountain peaks. The preferred direction for farming is the east, to avoid the harsh afternoon sun from the west.

The Ta Oi primarily rely on swidden agriculture for their livelihood. According to a household survey conducted in A Luoi district in 2022, 66% of Ta Oi households engage in swidden farming. About 19.5% of the population has moved away from this practice, citing reasons such as the distant location of farmland, soil degradation resulting in low productivity, and high labor demands. However, 37% of Ta Oi households expressed a desire to continue swidden farming for reasons like simplicity, low investment costs due to reliance on the soil's natural fertility, and the preservation of cultural customs and traditional practices.

The survey revealed that 29.5% of land selection for farming is facilitated by village elders, while approximately 37% is chosen independently by household heads. However, as land resources dwindle, the Ta Oi community in A Luoi faces limited options for farming. According to local Ta Oi, 53% believe land disputes, including those over swidden farming areas, were rare in the past. Only 12.5% mentioned occurrences of disputes. The rarity of conflicts is attributed to the strict and clear customary laws within the Ta Oi community, where disputes are primarily resolved by village elders. Respect for these laws and a lack of greed among the Ta Oi regarding land and forest resources contribute to this harmony.

To identify fertile land, the Ta Oi rely on indicators such as lush vegetation, minimal rocks, and the presence of worm mounds, signaling soil rich in nutrients and suitable for agriculture. Such land ensures abundant harvests and requires minimal weeding during early cultivation years, saving labor [11]. Below is a table summarizing key soil characteristics used by the Ta Oi to classify and select farming land (Table 4).

The Ta Oi people's method of selecting and classifying land as fertile or infertile primarily relies on observations of soil color, vegetation, and comparative plant growth. To differentiate between good and poor soil, they also use indicator plants, particularly grasses. For example, if cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) is prevalent, it indicates degraded, nutrient-poor soil with a thin layer of topsoil, unsuitable for cultivating food crops. Conversely, if abandoned or degraded land begins to show the growth of water-rich plants, it signifies soil fertility and nutrient recovery, making it viable again for productive use with good yields.

Despite this progress, during times of food shortages or seasonal difficulties, the Ta Oi people heavily rely on natural forest products for sustenance. This reliance has allowed them to accumulate significant knowledge and experience in sustainably harvesting and using forest resources, especially non-timber forest products (NTFPs). A notable example is their method of identifying poisonous mushrooms. The Ta Oi people only collect mushrooms at midday when the sun is high, as this ensures the mushrooms are fully exposed to sunlight, making them tougher and easier to distinguish. Poisonous mushrooms are often identified by their rough surfaces, bright colors, and the presence of black spots on their caps (Figure 3).

### The Ta Oi ethnic customary law system in forest resource conservation

The Ta Oi ethnic group in A Luoi district has a rich system of conventions and customary laws on ownership, protection, and exploitation of forest resources, closely linked to their cultural and spiritual life and daily production. Typically, some customary laws have been included in the poetry and festivals of the Ta Oi ethnic group. For example, the Ta Oi ethnic group advises their descendants: "When cutting a tree, you must cut it in the right place, when carving a tree, you must cut it so that it is straight, when climbing a tree, and you must secure the rope tightly" [12,13].

The system of conventions and customary laws was formed a long time ago, passed down from generation to generation.

**Table 4:** Knowledge in recognizing good and bad land of Ta Oi ethnic group.

Characteristics	Classification	
	Good land	Poor Land
Physical properties	Moist, retains water, porous	Dry, lacks moisture, non-porous
Color	Gray, reddish-yellow, brown	Bleached, white
Vegetation	Dense trees, old-growth, thriving greenery	Shrubs, small stunted trees
Other distinguishing traits	Abundant earthworms, termites, ant nests, rich in leaf litter	Sparse vegetation, minimal leaf litter, few earthworms/termites, rocky

Source: Survey Results in 2022



**Figure 3:** Traditional dancing, one of the event in the worship to the God for pumping crops.

Because the customary laws are included in poetry and festivals, the community strictly follows them. In addition, they contribute to the preservation and development over time. Like other ethnic minorities in Viet Nam's mountainous areas, the customary law of the Ta Oi ethnic group regulates many activities related to family life, society, property ownership, marriage relations, and cultural aspects of daily life [3].

**Customary law in exploiting and protecting forest resources:** In the Ta Oi ethnic community, the exploitation and protection of natural resources are generally linked together. Therefore, it is difficult to find a form of protection separate from their resource exploitation customs. Resource exploitation techniques include regulations to protect resources [11]. For example, the technique of cutting trees and branches as a fire prevention measure during land preparation, clearing trees after burning, and creating small holes for seeds in upland rice cultivation rather than plowing the soil to minimize the risk of erosion and leaching due to rain.

For sacred forests, ghost forests and watershed forests, the ultimate ownership belongs to the community and collective. The customary law of the Ta Oi ethnic group stipulates that trees must not be cut down, clearing fields and lighting fires are strictly prohibited, animals must not be hunted, and buffaloes and cows must not be grazed. Anyone who violates these prohibitions will be punished by the village with buffaloes and goats for serious violations or pigs and chickens for minor violations. This shows the importance of forests that are closely related to the spiritual life (ghost forests, sacred forests) and daily life (watershed forests) of the community. In the case of households with fields next to sacred forests, upstream forests, the community prescribes fire prevention methods when burning fields, as well as time and technical measures for the burning process such as choosing the wind direction and predicting favorable weather.

In forest exploitation, the customary law of the Ta Oi ethnic group stipulates that trees should not be cut down during full moon periods, because on moonless days the wood will not be infested with termites or worms. In collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs), the Ta Oi ethnic group relies on the

weather to identify the growth period of tree species or the reproductive period of wild animals to avoid exploitation. For example, collecting broom grass in the spring (lunar January) and collecting wild beehives in the second and third lunar months, when many plants are in bloom, the honey yield will be very high, the honey quality will be good.

- **Customary law on exploiting and protecting land resources:** This customary law is a convention and guides the practice in production and life of the Ta Oi ethnic group. These regulations are accumulated from the experience in the vibrant production life of the Ta Oi people. The customary law stipulates that choosing a place to farm should avoid steep slopes or hilltops of a mountain or hill, and should avoid upstream forests. Prior to swidden agriculture practices, experienced men in the village go around to check and look for areas with fertile land, few rocks, and not too far from water sources. After choosing a location, the villagers must organize a worship ceremony to pray for favorable conditions, in terms of rain, wind, and a bountiful harvest. After cutting and burning, people do not plow the land to avoid erosion. In the past, when land resources were still abundant and the government had not yet banned slash-and-burn farming, the Ta Oi ethnic people often left the land fallow after a long period of cultivation. This gave the land time to rest and restore nutrients. In addition, after 3 or 4 years of cultivation, a field would have many invasive weeds, and many birds and animals would destroy the crops. However, this custom no longer exists since the government issued regulations to limit deforestation for farming and implemented a policy requesting long-term stable settlement.
- **Customary law on exploitation and protection of rivers and streams:** Like other types of watershed forests, rivers and streams in the village area, especially streams that provide domestic water for the Ta Oi community, are strictly protected by the villagers. All daily activities are not allowed to go near the source of the stream, which is reserved for worshipping the gods, river gods, and water gods. Exploitation and fishing are also regulated and must not encroach on the source area to maintain water purity and prevent illnesses within the community, or be reprimanded by the gods. In particular, this is strictly implemented by the Ta Oi community, regardless of age, gender, or religious affiliation.

In summary, the customary rules and regulations of the Ta Oi ethnic group in managing, protecting, and utilizing forest resources possess many advantages, such as being easy to remember, simple to practice, and universally respected within the community. These rules have been passed down through generations, holding significant influence and authority within the community, requiring all members to comply. This traditional knowledge is preserved and orally transmitted to future generations through epic tales, legends, and daily agricultural and production activities, as well as the customs and traditions left by their ancestors. In summary of the findings, by harmonizing the traditional customs and cultural

practices of local communities with forest management and conservation, it is possible to achieve significant results. In this way, the “win-win” goal mentioned in Elinor Ostrom’s theory [14–18] can be realized, achieving both forest protection and development objectives while promoting the cultural values and livelihoods of local communities.

## Conclusion

- The Ta Oi are an ethnic minority with a long-standing tradition in A Luoi district, known for their management and conservation of the natural resources surrounding their living areas. This tradition has been preserved and passed down from generation to generation. Their methods of managing, utilizing, and conserving resources are embedded in their poetry and customary laws, ensuring that all community members internalize and practice these principles. Thus, the management, exploitation, and conservation of natural resources are institutionalized through the customary law system of the Ta Oi people. This is evident from the very low occurrence of forestry law violations within their community.
- The natural resources surrounding the Ta Oi people’s living areas serve as vital sources of livelihood, with forests and forestlands deeply intertwined with their cultural practices and community customs. Most of the cultural characteristics of the Ta Oi are closely linked to the management, exploitation, and conservation of forest resources, making them an integral part of community life. This provides a practical foundation for the Ta Oi people to rigorously and effectively manage, exploit, and conserve natural resources as an essential aspect of their daily lives.
- Successful management and conservation of natural resources, particularly forest and forestland can only be achieved when integrated with and based on local communities as these activities align with their cultural foundations and way of life. The Ta Oi people’s activities and development are closely tied to the natural resources surrounding their community. Therefore, entrusting them with the management, exploitation, and conservation of these resources aligns perfectly with their cultural, economic, and social conditions, maximizing community strength while minimizing potential negative impacts on these natural resources.
- The customary laws regarding the conservation of natural resources around the community are timeless and deeply rooted in the life of the Ta Oi people, regardless of where they reside. These laws have been preserved over time, reaffirming that customary laws for managing, exploiting, and conserving natural resources are objective and unchangeable under any circumstances.
- The Ta Oi people in A Luoi district, and in Central Viet Nam more broadly, are fully capable of managing,

exploiting, and conserving the natural resources surrounding them, thanks to their precious traditions and continuous creativity. This has been demonstrated over time, from the establishment of their community to the various political and social changes they have experienced. Moreover, this tradition continues to be preserved, passed down through generations, and is expected to endure.

Local authorities and state agencies in A Luoi district should continue allocating forests to local communities for long-term management and conservation, in line with their longstanding traditions.

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